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ABSTRACT

This discussion, presented at the Regent's Trustees' Conference, February 1973, reviews the limits of accountability in higher education. Managerial efficiency is suggested to assist in eliminating educational and financial waste. This, however, is the secondary concept emphasized. The primary emphasis indicates the legitimacy of the claims that a partially unquantifiable and inherently untidy postsecondary education must routinely make upon educational finance. (Author/MJM)

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Regent from New York State's
Fifth Judicial District

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Remarks at the Regents Trustees' Conference, Hilton Hotel, New York City, February 8, 1973.

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Stephen K. Bailey
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Chancellor McGovern, Fellow Regents, Commissioner Nyquist, distinguished guests --

As all of us know, there are tides in the affairs of individuals that separate them from long-held and deeply valued associations. These transitions are never easy. In the case of my leaving the Board of Regents, there is a particular pang. As this audience knows perhaps better than any other, there is an uncommon satisfaction in working with a few dedicated colleagues on matters that matter. One derives psychic sustenance from the collegial process of decision-making. Each is strengthened by the presence of others. Each becomes wiser in the light of alternative experiences and perspectives. Each mind becomes honed by friendly arguments, and chastened by the complexities of the endless policy dialectic.

With enormous personal affection and respect, I say to all of my fellow Regents, "I shall miss you, and I am very grateful to you." With, but preferably without, an Inspector General, long may you wave!

This emotion is equally extended to Commissioner Nyquist and to his remarkable staff in the State Education Department. In thirty years of exposure to, and involvement in, big government, I know of no public enterprise more humanely, more creatively, or more efficiently managed.

My wife and I shall also miss our association with our friends in Syracuse and in New York State generally. A part of us will always remain here. An important compensation in assuming new responsibilities in Washington is the knowledge that our work will continue to involve us with many of you in this room on matters of mutual interest and concern. Education, especially higher education, is on the defensive in Washington and across the land. We have a hard time explaining and justifying our needs to others because we have all but lost the capacity to explain our central mission to ourselves. Some of you may have noted in last Sunday's New York Times Book Review a reference to Lionel Trilling's allusion in his 1972 Jefferson Lecture to "'the growing intellectual recessiveness of college and university faculties,' their inability to defend themselves against government edicts, or to produce an articulate theory of Higher Education." It is difficult to be called, as you and I are, to be "defenders of the faith" at a time when faith in education is in disarray -- and when the very concept of "faith" itself resonates with the nostalgic notes of a very distant Angelus.

And yet this large room is crowded. I assume that all of us are here because we give a damn, and because we hope that in some ways in our intermittent encounters we can join hearts and minds in a common and compelling affirmation.

Perhaps our wisdom begins in reviewing why higher education is on the defensive.

If you will forgive the praetoritea, I shall not remind you of the many reasons: the rapidly escalating costs of education; the campus unrest of the late '60's; the growing governmental skepticism about the social utility of academic research; the collision of generational values on academic turf -- a collision that forces academic staff to side either with the parents who feed them or with the young people who need them; a widespread suspicion that the "college bred have had a four year loaf"-- as the old saw has it; the alleged slackening of academic standards under the pressure of numbers and open enrollment; the decibels of noise from campus orators aimed at the very politicians whose votes are needed if next year's academic budget is to be met; the dissatisfaction of many students and parents with the education being purveyed; an insidious corrosion of our very faith in reason itself -- perhaps an understandable backlash to the hubris of too many academic scientists and the preciousness of too many humanistic scholars. Finally, the war on the one hand and high rates of youth unemployment on the other have overlaid much of higher education of the past decade with a blanket of cynicism and futility. Perhaps everything else we have mentioned is a sullen derivative of these secular tragedies.

Whatever the multiple causes of our present defensiveness, we are caught up in a strangely simplified response. The response is encapsulated in terms like "accountability", "productivity", "efficiency", "fiscal responsibility", "better management systems", "cost effectiveness", "PPB". In part, higher education deserves this. There has been, and there is, a lot of fat in academic

management. I have little patience, for example, with faculty and students who demand 9:00, 10:00, or 11:00 a.m. classes only, Monday through Friday -- thereby leaving a vast amount of expensive academic plant unutilized during half the work week. All of us get upset, or should get upset, by institutional egoisms that preclude regional efficiencies in library acquisitions and computer-sharing. Investment policies of colleges have tended to gyrate between portfolios of penury and wild orgies at the race track. Faculty resistance to the introduction of educational technology, to various forms of non-traditional studies, and to outside calls for a more precise definition of academic goals have understandably worn thin the patience of those called upon to finance higher education -- seemingly at ever higher rates. Too many Presidents and Chancellors have balanced budgets on the nose of the corpse of deferred maintenance.

As my title suggests, I believe that there are "limits to accountability" in education, but many colleges and universities have not reached those limits, and both public and private supporters of higher education have the right and the obligation to press for tidier management, for a more effective utilization of human and physical resources, for a more imaginative exploration of alternative paths to individual academic achievement outside as well as inside college classrooms. Surely we do need better financial management if we are to deserve more financial resources from public and private donors. This is the theme of our gathering today. My guess is that it will come close to being the dominant theme of the 1970's. Quiet huzzahs will fill the air of trustees meetings as ratios of FTE's to units-of-usable-floor-space improve by even the smallest

of incremental fractions. Smiles of stoic satisfaction will presumably greet the announcement that because of small enrollments, Greek Mythology and the Senior seminars on Milton and on Chinese music have been dropped from the catalog. Each faculty member will be forced to state his course objectives clearly, and to develop measures of productivity to determine whether the objectives are being met and how well, for how many students headed for what precise occupations sanctified by which latest manpower survey. This information will be computerized and will become part of the management information system aimed at improving cost-benefit determinations undergirding next year's budget allocations. If we work hard, we can undoubtedly make education supremely efficient and accountable by at least 1984.

If my words skirt the rim of the sardonic, I apologize -- in part. Actually, I do not question that one of our responsibilities is to see to it that academic resources are efficiently used; that hard won and scarce financial resources are not frittered away; that tax moneys, tuitions, and private gifts are not dissipated on trifles and indefensible perquisites. Efficiency is what we render to Caesar, and I need hardly remind you that Caesar has his legions.

It is perhaps the very awesomeness of the powers and principalities on the side of the cult of efficiency that compell me to contend with some fervor that there are limits to accountability, to efficiency, to slide-rule definitions of productivity in education. In fact, in my estimation, the ultimate philistinism of our culture would be the total imposition of management science upon the educational process. I am not opposed to faculty unionism. I think that it may have benefits that will more than compensate for the dire

effects predicted by some of its worried enemies. But, unless carefully guarded, faculty unionism could well exacerbate the secular drift toward education's domination by efficiency cultists. Faculty, like the rest of us, are not incapable of selling their souls for a mess of potage. Trade-offs of higher salaries for faculty submission to the calipers of CPA's and systems-analysts may well be the contractual paradigm of the next decade. If so, we may well lose what we are trying to save.

Well, what is it that we are trying to save?

Perhaps we nave lost it already. Maybe we in the Halls of Academe have killed it from within by the aridity, sterility, and arcane quality of much of our research. Perhaps we have lost it in our struggle for parking-lot status, or through our incapacity to distinguish between student anguish and student bullying. Perhaps we have lost our essence in the contradictions we have allowed to develop between our claims to academic freedom on the one hand, and, on the other, the intemperate and irresponsible politicking we often indulge in under the cloak of the very immunities we call upon others to protect. "Self-discipline", as John Gardner has reminded us, "is the yoke of free men." Self-discipline we, in the higher academy, have not always demonstrated.

But I really do not believe that post-secondary education has lost its essential raison d'etre. My real point today is that the essence is under siege from within and without, and we need to break out of the sullen blockades that surround us.

What is the essence? In some ways, it defies description. But what we cannot define, perhaps we can illustrate.

For example, the discipline of Mathematics is loaded with useful instruments. A working knowledge of those instruments in pure and applied form is amenable to tests and measurements -- hence to some cost/benefit model of pedagogic effect. So far so good. But where is the measurement for that instant, that ineffable moment, known to every Math professor worth his salt, when the eyes of one of his students wander unfocused and luminous past the teacher and the blackboard in the sudden discovery of the symetry, the wonder, and the principled beauty of the universe?

A working knowledge of words, of vocabulary, is measurable by criterion-referenced tests. We can measure how many words a student knows the meaning of in September, and how many more he knows the meaning of in June. Fairly precise "program objectives" can be set for syntax and for spelling. But how does one measure the mounting excitement of a student who, in catching the cadence of a line from Yeats, suddenly feels the Irish Sea breaking inside of him?

One can test for a knowledge of composers, or even for a recognition of symphonic themes and operatic arias. But how does one count tingles on the human spine?

Multiple-choice tests have been worked out to enable institutions and admissions officers to determine whether students can connect Bernard Shaw and Major Barbara, Ibsen and Dolls House, Shakespeare and Hamlet. But where are the measurements of the lights of human understanding that students internalize from reading or watching great theatre?

Behavioral Scientists can list the behavioral consequences of aggression. These can be memorized for machine-graded examinations. But how do we measure

the importance of a student's speculation that if we know all this, how come mankind still "aggresses"?

On a cost-effective basis we can, of course, lop off a course in Greek Mythology because of low enrollments. But it is possible that if one or two of our Statesmen had read about Promethean hubris prior to our excursions in Vietnam, the world might have been spared 10 or 20 years of the anger of the Gods.

We can stop faculty junketing to academic conferences by holding down travel budgets or multiplying travel forms, but the search for truth will suffer from lack of faculty exposure to both catalysts and critics.

And what of the dividends of faculty-student friendships? Remember the lovely confession of E. B. White? "When I was an undergraduate," he once wrote, "there were a few professors who went out of their way to befriend students. At the house of one of these men I felt more at home than I did in my own home with my own father and mother. I felt excited, instructed, accepted, influential, and in a healthy condition."

Surely if we have a responsibility to insist that what is rendered to Caesar is rendered efficiently, we have an equal if not superior responsibility to insure that what is rendered to God is rendered effectively. This may mean in turn, and in some circumstances, that narrow cannons of efficiency can be in truth the enemy of effectiveness. A possibly useful analogy comes to mind. It is not necessarily inefficient for a land-use planner to set aside for wilderness pieces of earth whose highest <u>economic</u> gain might be high-rise apartments. Similarly, academia needs some spiritual space, some physical

space, some intellectual space, some temporal space that is uncluttered by the artifacts of management logicians and quantitative doodlers. If we would be true "defenders of the faith" we must be willing to promote efficiency while protecting effectiveness. And we must learn to know when these concepts are compatible and when they are not.

Fortunately, we are not alone in recognizing this basic issue. I would remind you that during the dark days of the late '60's, it was a few politicians in the legislative and executive branches of our State and National governments that preserved education from the imposition of barbaric external constraints upon academic processes. We owe those politicians much. I wonder if we ever took the time to thank them?

I do not know why we are on this earth any more than you do. I do know that for most of mankind, life is a dirty trick. For others it is lived, in Thoreau's term, in "quiet desperation". The promise of education is that through knowledge of nature and knowledge of self, man can fashion a temporary habitat on this whirling planet that can cater with increasing felicity to the impertinent claims of his restless soul. We get seduced into narrow definitions of education's function: the development of job skills (which we need); the mastery of specific disciplines (which is important); the capacity to communicate (which is indispensable); the uncovering of new knowledge and the refining of old knowledge (which is essential). These are mostly measurable goals of education.

But I must submit, as I did over a decade ago, when I began my tenure as Dean of the Maxwell School at Syracuse, that important as these listed functions

are, the prime function of education is not in fact measurable. For the prime, the ultimate function of education is to restore man's sense of his own nobility.

The insistent message of the prophetic geniuses of history is that there is a qualitative difference between man and beast -- that man has the capacity to enter into a special relationship with the universe and that this special relationship is man's glory and meaning. The Psalmist asked the appropriate question and affirmed the appropriate answer:

> When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor.

We, in this century, need no blind poet to remind us of our Paradise Lost, nor a William Blake to illuminate the convolutions of hell. We in this cataclysmic epoch know how far man has fallen. But to fall is one thing; to despair is quite another. We despair, and we have forgotten why we despair. Fundamentally, we despair not because of external horrors or existential suspicions of personal mortality. We despair because we have forgotten our place in the universe, because we have become so preoccupied with man as animal and man as object that we have forgotten man as creative spirit and man as noble subject. In the name of realism we have fashioned a monstrous caricature. We have accepted Jonathan Swift's view of man as "Yahoo," while ignoring the nobility which Swift transferred satirically to the horse but which can be discovered only in the heart and mind of man.

Why do we forget so easily? What has happened to this generation that we ignore the capacities and promise of man? We study the ashes and ignore the phoenix. We dwell upon our failings and shrug off our triumphs. We see London through the eyes of Hogarth and pretend that Christopher Wren never lived. We have become aliens in our universal home because we have become aliens to ourselves.

We are storm-weary. The turbulence of violent change in this century has plunged us, like a frail aircraft, into a towering cloud of spiritual darkness from which no escape seems possible. One of the difficulties is that we have not read enough history to recognize both the transient nature of all thunderheads -- no matter how massive -- and the buoyancy of the wings of the human spirit for negotiating attenuated stress.

In disproving progress we have forgotten the reality of the Pilgrim's Progress. Writing in the dingy jail of Bedford, John Bunyan in his great allegory lets Christian fall into the clutches of Giant Dispair. Giant Despair's castle (which Bunyan astutely labels Doubting Castle) has a dark dungeon with no possiblity of escape. But finally the prisoner plucks from his own bosom a key called Promise and opens wide the dungeon door into a larger life.

Every university is in part a Doubting Castle, for one of a university's prime responsibilities is to doubt. But the other great responsibility of a university is to affirm, to establish fertile hypotheses -- including fertile hypotheses about the nature and promise of persons.

Surely this is our supreme contribution to our students and to each other: to rekindle excitement in life by touching the fire of man's promise to the wick of learning. Far too often we have settled for less. We dissect man. We put calipers upon his littleness. We mechanize and quantify him. We spell out with excruciating candor his palpable failures of nerve and intelligence and benevolence -- individually and collectively. We thrust our telescopes into the blackness of infinity and poke our cameras into the fitful tackings of subnuclear activity; and we ignore the wonder of what we observe and the even greater wonder of the observer's eye and mind. We measure IQ's and dismiss as irrelevant the quotients of beauty and goodness.

The ultimate business of education is human freedom. If human freedom means nothing but the sad and sorry flow of existence upon a well-documented darkling plain, the charge to university graduates should be to push the button when they have the chance. If the human race has, in fact, been caught up in an irreversible ebb tide, if Matthew Arnold's transient mood at Dover Beach has become an eternal reality, then it is irrelevant whether the missiles fall. For the option is an endless melancholy, a sullen ennui -- deaf to the song of the thrush, blind to the evening sky and indifferent to the creative wonders of man's mind and hand.

Education must affirm today, as in one sense it always has, the promise of human life. It must help us to see citizens and public officials not as instruments of survival or vegetable security, but as possible instruments of human freedom It must help us see the good society as an arrangement of

institutions and laws which helps to free men from bondages of fear and loneliness, and injustice, and from the crushing impersonalities of life. It must help us promote all that is ennobling and creative in the human psyche. It must help us to posit a society whose ultimate dividends are joy and variety and vitality within the bounds of community, and in which humanistic critics postulate man not just as he has been or as he is, but as he can be.

The job of education is to help men and women to see reality as the God of Genesis saw the chaos, as clay to be worked; and above all, to recognize that the working of the clay is part of the reality, and that the clay is to be worked for man's individual fulfillment.

If we pass on to each other an easy optimism unrelated to the intractabilities and complexities of modern life, we do a disservice, but if we cannot pass on to each other hope and faith -- a mounting excitement about the future possibilities of the human adventure -- nothing we do will be of much account. To educate young people to live in a materialistic ant heap is hardly a calling worthy of the name.

The great philosopher-king of pre-war Czechoslovakia, Thomas Masaryk, once defined our supreme task for us. Writing in the twilight of his years, after decades of struggle in the harsh arena of public life, Masaryk summed up his philosophy in the following words, "You see how it is: the method must be absolutely practical, reasonable, realistic, but the aim, the whole, the conception is an eternal poem."

Our supreme function is not to improve managerial efficiency in education; although we have no reason to countenance obvious waste, and we do have obligations to the public to see that money is not used frivolously. Our supreme obligation is to remind ourselves and our public and private benefactors of the legitimacy of the claims that a partially unquantifiable and inherently untidy post-secondary education must routinely make upon the treasuries of the purse in order to nourish the treasuries of the mind and spirit. For freedom is the condition of nobility, and knowledge is the condition of freedom.

For what avail the plough or sail,
Or land or life, if freedom fail?